



*Draft Environmental Assessment
for the*

**Walter E. Hoffman
United States Courthouse
Proposed Courthouse Annex
Norfolk, Virginia**



Responsible Agency:

**General Services Administration
Region 3**

April 2006



2 ALTERNATIVES INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

NEPA requires that federal agencies explore a range of reasonable alternatives that are practicable or feasible from a technical and economic standpoint and that would satisfy the goals or objectives of the proposed action. The alternatives under consideration must include the “No Action” Alternative as prescribed by 40 CFR 1502.14. Project alternatives may originate from the proponent agency, local officials, or members of the public, at public meetings or during the early stages of project development. Alternatives may also be developed in response to comments from coordinating or cooperating agencies.

Alternatives considered in regard to this proposed action are analyzed under the following headings:

- **The No-Action Alternative:** A decision not to proceed with the construction of an annex to the U.S. Courthouse in Norfolk, Virginia.
- **Other Alternatives Considered and Eliminated:** Other alternatives considered and eliminated are those that warrant only a brief discussion as to the reasons for their elimination. They include leasing of an existing structure or the construction of a new courthouse at a site separate from the existing courthouse.
- **Alternatives Warranting Consideration in Detail:** Potential sites which are of sufficient size to accommodate the proposed facility; are located in downtown Norfolk in proximity to the existing courthouse; have been or can be connected to utilities at reasonable cost; and are available for development by the federal government without undue financial burden.

No reasonable alternatives outside the jurisdiction of GSA (the lead agency) have been identified or warrant inclusion in this Environmental Assessment.

2.1 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED

2.1.1 ADAPTIVE RE-USE OF EXISTING COMMERCIAL SPACE

Adapting existing space to meet the need for additional courtrooms and related space was considered for the Norfolk Courthouse Annex. When evaluating existing structures in Norfolk that would be suitable for re-use, several important physical issues would have to be kept in mind. The architecture of a federal courthouse must promote respect for the tradition and purpose of the American judicial process. To this end, a courthouse must express solemnity, stability, integrity, rigor and fairness. The facility must also provide a civic presence and contribute to the architecture of the local community. To achieve these goals, massing must be strong and direct with a sense of repose, and the scale of design should reflect a national judicial enterprise. All architectural elements must be proportional and arranged hierarchically to significant orderliness. The building materials employed must be consistently applied, natural and regional in origin, durable and invoke a sense of permanence.

More importantly, the specific design and operating requirements for court and related agency functions, with particular regard to security, are not easily met through leased space. To accommodate movement within a courthouse, three separate circulation zones must be provided: public, restricted, and secure. Public circulation requires a single controlled entry, but allows free movement within the building. Restricted circulation requires a single controlled interior entry and is limited to judges, court personnel, and official visitors. Secure circulation is intended for prisoners and is controlled by the U.S. Marshals Service. Because these security requirements cannot be met through adaptive re-use, this alternative is deemed to be neither prudent nor in the best interest of the public and was eliminated from further consideration.

2.1.2 FEDERAL CONSTRUCTION OF NEW STAND ALONE COURTHOUSE

Another option considered was the construction of a new, stand-alone courthouse to replace the existing Hoffman Courthouse. The existing courthouse is considered to be in good condition, both structurally and mechanically. In the past 25 years, a substantial investment has been made in the building, in the form of major renovations or modifications, as detailed below:

| <u>Year:</u> | <u>Improvement:</u> |
|--------------|---|
| 1975 | A major systems upgrade was completed. |
| 1984-1985 | A major renovation of the first floor occurred when the Post Office moved out of the building and three new courtrooms and chambers suites were built. In addition, a substantial portion of the third floor was renovated to create the chambers suites for the Senior Judges. |
| 1991 | The second floor received a major renovation to provide space and facilities for Probation, Pretrial Services, and Court Reporters, as well as snack bar and lounge. |
| 1993 | Most of the fourth floor received a major renovation to provide space and facilities for the Bankruptcy Court Clerk's Office, two Bankruptcy Courtrooms and two Bankruptcy Judge's chambers. |
| 1995 | Another District Courtroom and chambers suite was completed on the first floor. |

An analysis by GSA indicates that the cost of constructing a new, stand-alone courthouse is significantly higher than the cost of constructing an annex and renovating the existing courthouse. Given the significance of the investment in the existing courthouse, as well as the strong desire of the courts to continue to use the existing building, coupled with the fact that construction of a stand-alone facility is more expensive, the new construction alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

2.1.3 LEASE CONSTRUCTION

Another alternative considered was lease construction. Under this alternative, a new courthouse would be built to GSA standards by a developer and then leased to the government. A cost analysis by GSA has also indicated the cost of this alternative significantly higher than the cost of constructing an annex and renovating the existing courthouse. As a result, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES GIVEN DETAILED CONSIDERATION

Six alternatives are analyzed in detail in this EA: the No-Action Alternative, the Southern Annex Alternative, the Northern Annex Alternative, the Western Annex Alternative, the Eastern Annex Alternative, and a Tower Alternative (Figure 2-1).

2.2.1 NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The No-Action Alternative in this instance is defined as a decision by GSA not to proceed with the construction of the proposed annex to the U.S. Courthouse. Selection of this alternative would further exacerbate the growing backlog of cases within the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia in general, and in the Norfolk Division specifically. Although the few temporary and otherwise slight adverse impacts associated with the proposed action would not occur if the project were not constructed, neither would the positive judicial, economic and related benefits.

The choice of this alternative would not result simply in the continuation of the status quo. Existing federal court space in Norfolk has been deemed inadequate. This space deficit restricts the Courts and court-related agencies from efficiently carrying out their missions and impedes future growth. In addition, the existing Walter E. Hoffman Courthouse does not provide adequate security. At present, there is no prisoner circulation system within the courthouse; with the public, jurors, trial participants and judicial officers sharing the same elevators and hallways. The USMS must unload prisoners in the north parking lot used for judges parking and walk them into the building. Therefore, selection of the No-Action Alternative would not eliminate the need for some type of action. Eventually, action to address present and future federal court space needs in Norfolk would be required. The No-Action Alternative would avoid the potential impacts and inconveniences associated with construction, such as noise and temporary disruption of traffic patterns. As documented herein, however, none of these impacts, properly mitigated, would constitute significant adverse impacts as defined by NEPA. Avoidance of these less than significant impacts must be contrasted with the loss of positive benefits, such as the lessening of overcrowded conditions in the existing federal court facilities, societal benefits derived from efficient operation of the activities and operational expenditures. In light of these considerations, the No-Action Alternative is deemed to be neither prudent nor in the best interest of the public.

Although the No-Action Alternative would not meet the purpose and need of the project, as part of NEPA analysis, the environmental impacts of the No-Action Alternative must be considered. This analysis serves as a baseline for comparison of other alternatives.

2.2.2 SOUTHERN ANNEX ALTERNATIVE

The Southern Annex Site is located south of the existing courthouse and is bounded by Bute Street to the north, Granby Street to the west, Monticello Avenue to the east, and Charlotte Street to the south (Figure 2-2). Under this alternative, a new annex would be built on the Southern Annex Site and attached to the existing courthouse. A 6,000 usf addition on the north side of the existing courthouse would also be constructed in place of an existing small parking lot. The Southern Annex would be one story taller than the existing courthouse for a total of five stories excluding the mechanical penthouse. Use of this site would require the closing of Bute Street between Granby and Monticello to allow for the connection of the annex to the existing courthouse. In addition, two lanes of Monticello Avenue would be closed. Under this alternative, the Lofts at 500 Granby, formerly the Showcase Building, which occupies the south site along with a small plaza, would be acquired. The approximate cost of expansion and renovation of the courthouse under this alternative is \$144,947,315.

2.2.3 WESTERN ANNEX ALTERNATIVE

The Western Annex Site is located immediately west of the courthouse in an area bounded by Brambleton Avenue to the north, Bute Street to the south, Granby Street to the east, and an imaginary north-south line situated about 300 feet west of Granby Street, just east of the existing telephone company building (Figure 2-3). The Western Annex would be one story taller than the existing courthouse for a total of five stories excluding the mechanical penthouse. Use of this site for the development of an annex would require the closing of West York Street between approximately the telephone company building and Granby Street.

Under this alternative, the courthouse annex would be connected to the existing courthouse by a tunnel underneath Granby Street. The 2.4-acre site (approximate) is currently unimproved. Ground was recently broken on this site for a new 31-story condominium tower, Granby Tower. The approximate cost of expansion and renovation of the courthouse under this alternative is \$180,928,120.

2.2.4 NORTHERN ANNEX ALTERNATIVE

The Northern Annex Site is bounded by Stark Street to the north, Brambleton Avenue to the south, Monticello Avenue to the east, and Granby Street to the west. Under this alternative, the courthouse annex would be connected to the existing courthouse by either a concourse underneath or a bridge over Brambleton Avenue (Figure 2-4). The bridge connection, if selected would be over 200 feet in length, and there would not be a connection on every floor of the existing courthouse. The Northern Annex would be one story taller than the existing courthouse for a total of five stories excluding the mechanical penthouse. The approximate cost of expansion and renovation of the courthouse under this alternative is \$162,676,580.

2.2.5 EASTERN ANNEX ALTERNATIVE

The Eastern Annex Site is bounded by Brambleton Avenue to the north, Bute Street to the south, the Norfolk Scope Arena to the east, and the Walter E. Hoffman Courthouse to the

west. Use of this site for the development of an annex would require the closing of Monticello Avenue between Bute Street and Brambleton Avenue (Figure 2-5). Under this alternative, a new annex would be built on the Site and attached to the existing courthouse. The Eastern Annex would be two stories above the existing courthouse for a total of six stories excluding the mechanical penthouse. The approximate cost of expansion and renovation of the courthouse under this alternative is \$147,825,715.

2.2.6 TOWER ANNEX ALTERNATIVE

The Tower Annex Alternative would be built within the existing courtyard of the Walter E. Hoffman United States Courthouse (Figure 2-6). The Tower Annex would be 7 stories above the existing courthouse for a total of 11 stories excluding the mechanical penthouse. Use of this site for the development of an annex would require the closing of two lanes of Monticello Avenue between Bute Street and Brambleton Avenue; and Bute Street between Monticello Avenue and Granby Street. The approximate cost of expansion and renovation of the courthouse under this alternative is \$166,226,970.

Table 2-1: Cost of Expansion and Renovation of the Courthouse by Alternative

| | Southern Alternative | Western Alternative | Northern Alternative | Eastern Alternative | Tower Alternative |
|-------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Cost | \$144,947,315 | \$180,928,120 | \$162,676,580 | \$147,825,715 | \$166,226,970 |

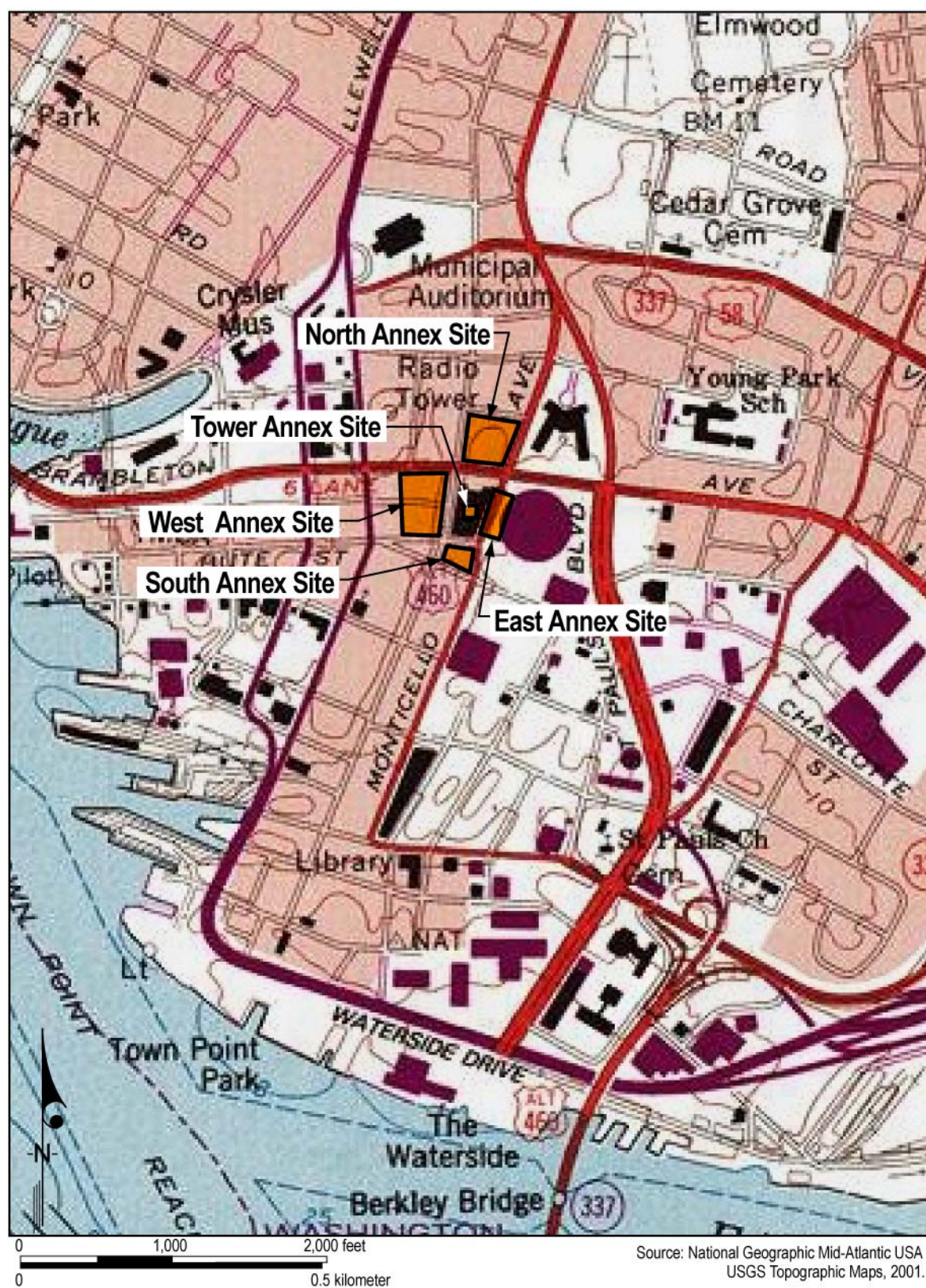
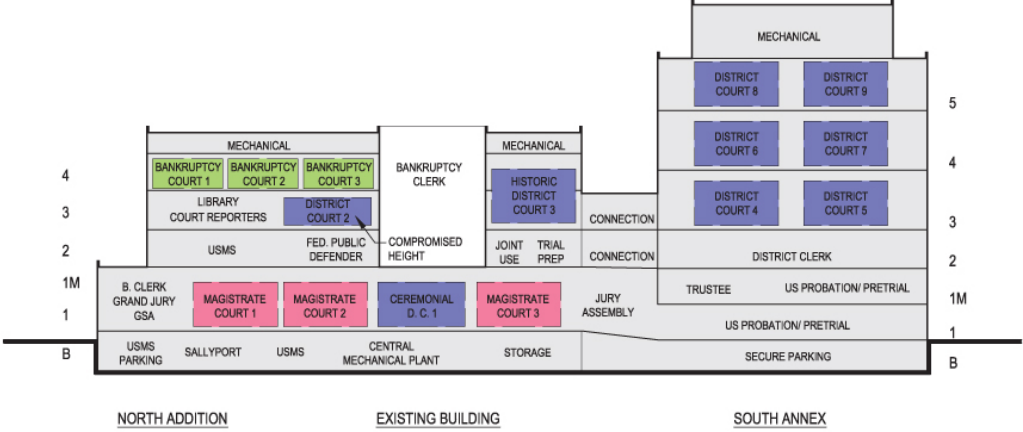


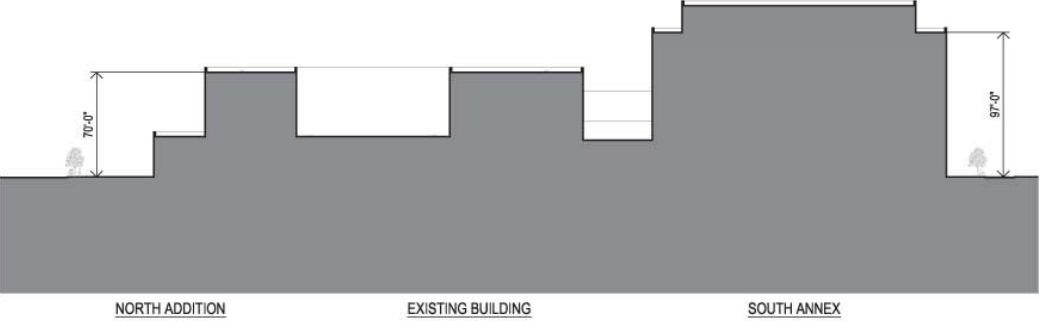
Figure 2-1: Alternative Site Locations



- KEY
- ▲ Pedestrian Entrance
 - ▲ Secure Parking Entrance
 - ▲ Loading/Service
 - ▲ Secure Sallyport Entrance



STACKING DIAGRAM
Not to Scale



SITE SECTION



Hartman-Cox Architects

Figure 2-2: The Southern Annex Alternative

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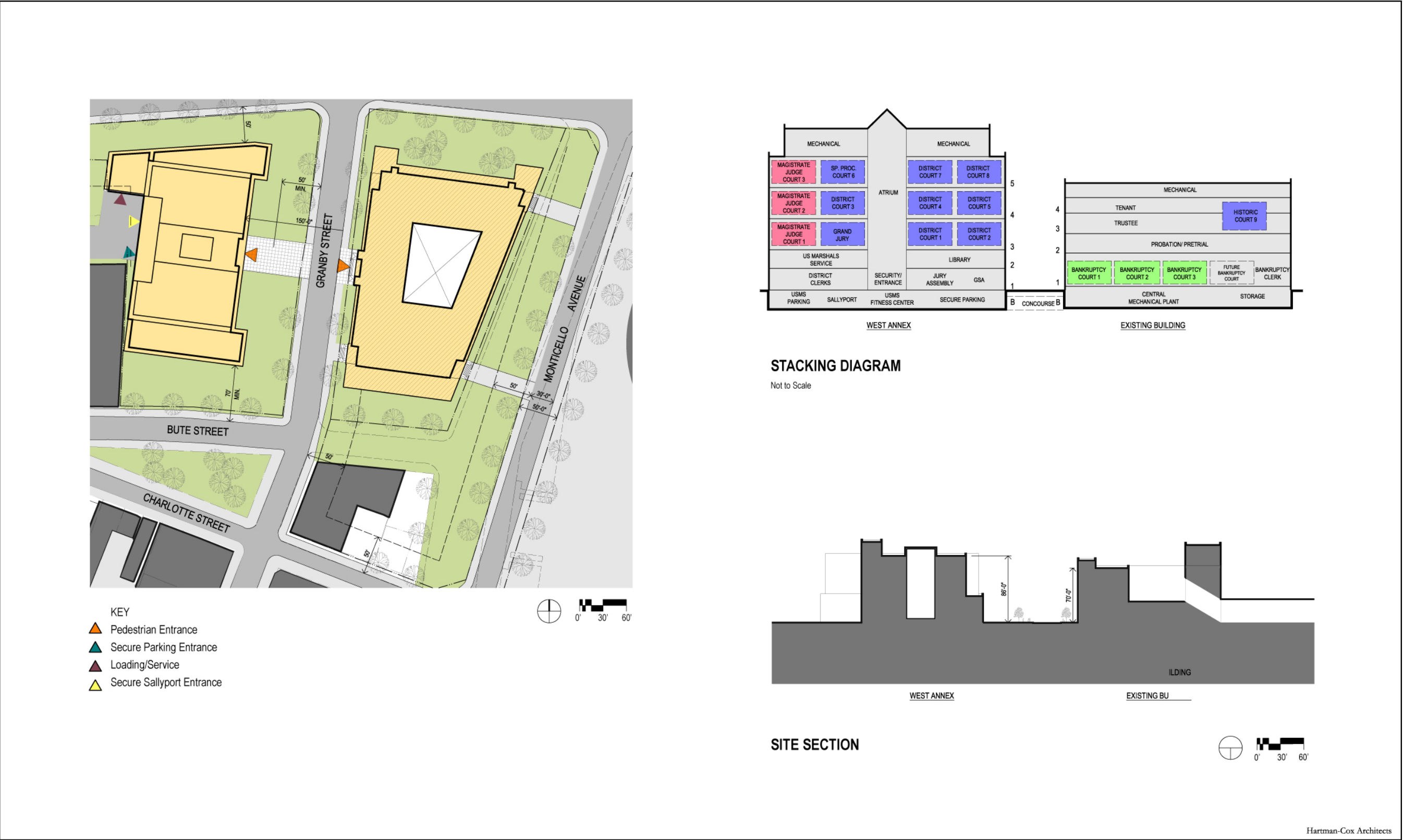


Figure 2-3: The Western Annex Alternative

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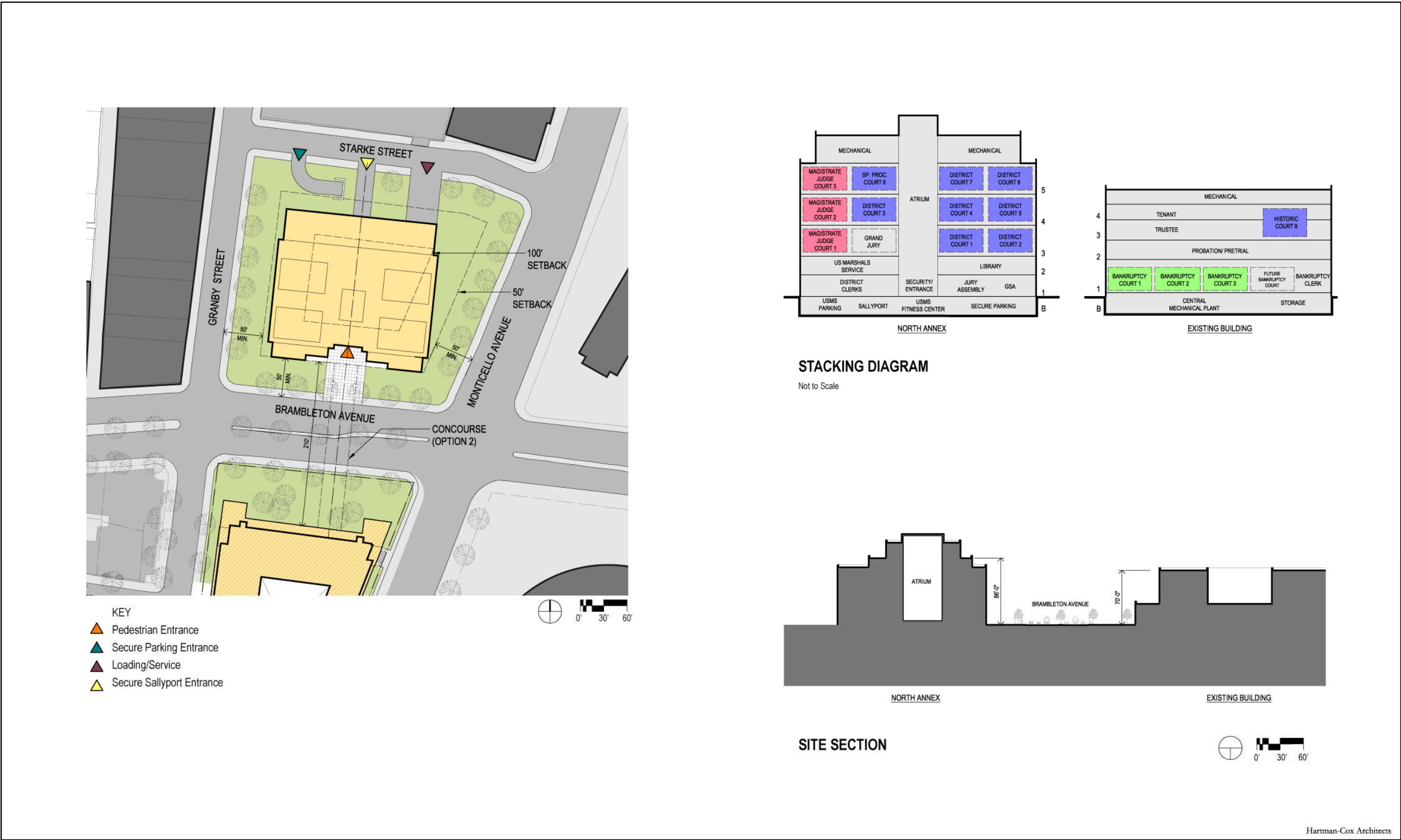


Figure 2-4: The Northern Annex Alternative

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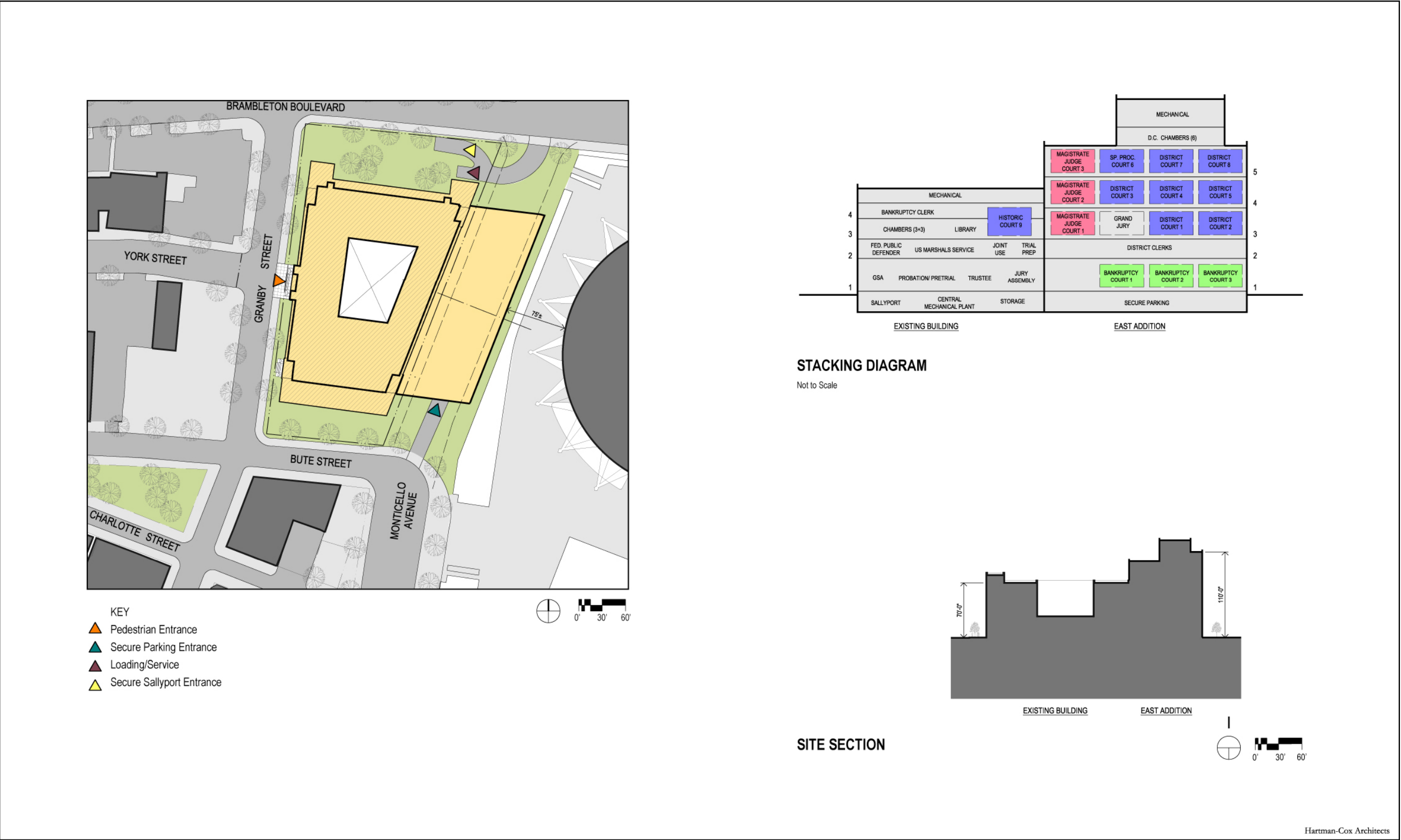


Figure 2-5: The Eastern Annex Alternative

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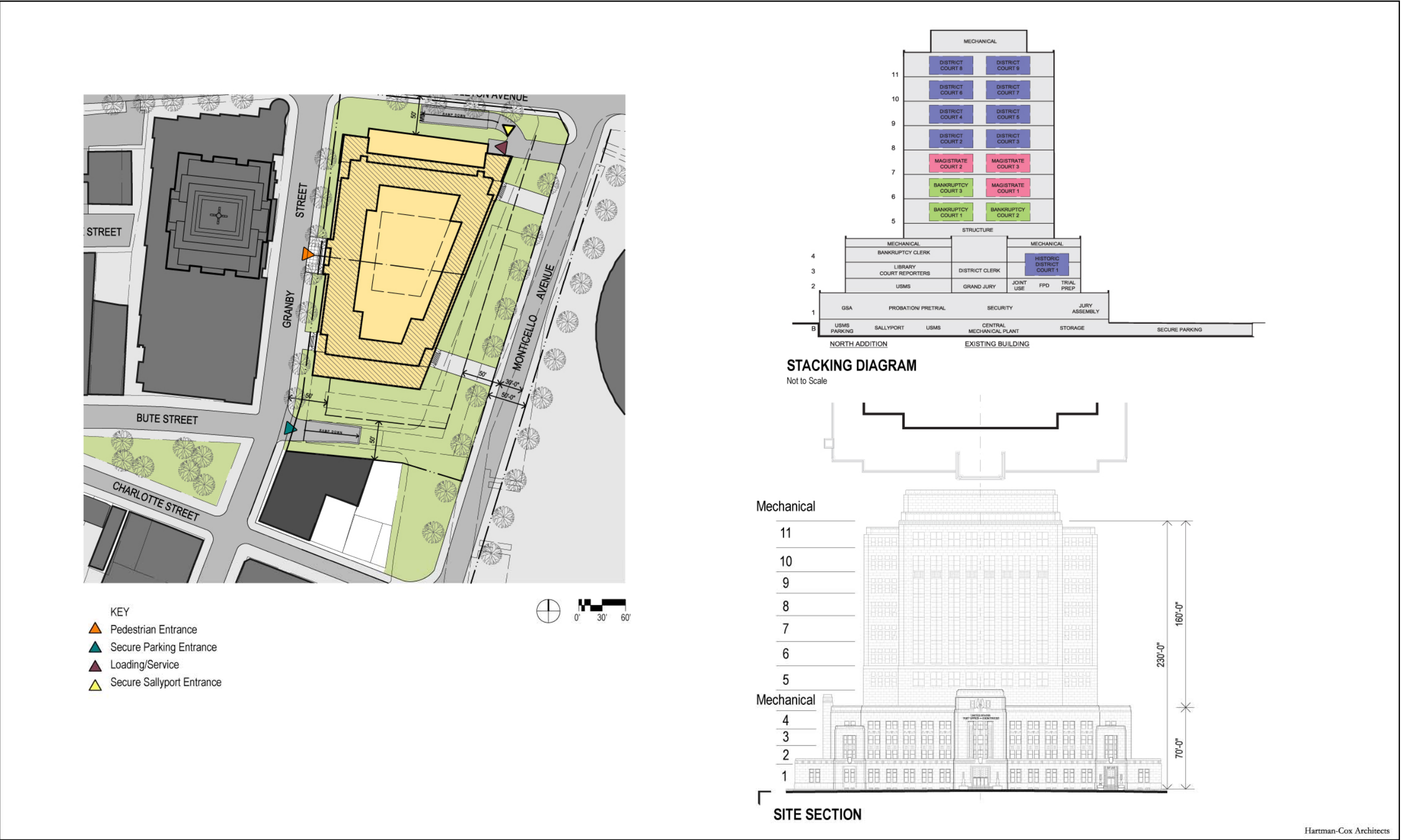


Figure 2-6: The Tower Annex Alternative

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